



# Use of SME marketing practices in Mexico City and their relationship to competitiveness

## Uso de las prácticas de comercialización de las PYME de la Ciudad de México y su relación con la competitividad

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### Abstract

*The aim of this research is to find out about the marketing practices used by Smes in Mexico City and to determine whether they are related to internal competitiveness, considering the size and sector in which they operate. The research method is empirical with a descriptive and correlational scope, working with a sample of 400 Smes collecting data through a field study, applied the IDB competitiveness map adapted by Saavedra (2014b), which measures the internal competitiveness of the companies considering 8 areas, for this work was only analyzed the area of marketing that includes the practices: Market plan, commercial strategies, knowledge of competitors, pricing, new products, marketing, customer service, sales force and distribution systems. The results show a low level of application of marketing practices, determined by the use of basic practices and a significant relationship between marketing practices and competitiveness, which implies the importance of the use of marketing practices to boost the competitiveness of Smes.*

### Resumen

El objetivo de esta investigación consiste en conocer las prácticas de comercialización que utilizan las PYME de la Ciudad de México y determinar si existe relación entre estas y la competitividad interna, considerando el tamaño y el sector en que se desempeñan. El método de investigación es empírico con un alcance descriptivo y correlacional, se trabajó con una muestra de 400 PYME recolectando datos a través de un trabajo de campo, se aplicó el mapa de competitividad del BID adaptado por Saavedra (2014b), que mide la competitividad interna de las empresas considerando 8 áreas, para este trabajo sólo se analizó el área de comercialización que incluye las prácticas: Plan de mercado, estrategias comerciales, conocimiento de competidores, determinación de precios, productos nuevos, marketing, servicio al cliente, fuerza de ventas y sistemas de distribución. Los resultados muestran un bajo nivel de aplicación de las prácticas de Comercialización, determinado por el uso de prácticas básicas y una relación significativa entre las prácticas de comercialización y la competitividad, lo cual implica la importancia del uso de prácticas de comercialización para impulsar la competitividad de las PYME.

### Keywords | palabras clave

*Competitiveness, SMEs, marketing, profitability, competitors, customers, sales, products.*

Competitividad, PYME, marketing, rentabilidad, competidores, clientes, ventas, productos.

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## 1. Introduction

SME<sup>1</sup> are necessary in the social development of nations, and a noteworthy aspect is their high employability rate (Saavedra, 2014a). According to official data published by INEGI (2020), 95% of the total economic units in Mexico are micro-enterprises, 4% are small and 0.8% medium, which contribute to 52% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and generate 68.4% of employment. In terms of sectoral classification, 12.19% belong to the industry sector, 46.65% are companies in the trade sector, 39.15% are companies in the non-financial service sector and 2.01% are in the economic sector (INEGI, 2020), which allows to see that trade and services predominate in Mexican SMEs.

Also, in Mexico according to INEGI (2019) SMEs have had many deficiencies especially in the administrative aspect, since only 15% train their employees, only 14% take action and implement a process of continuous improvement to solve production problems, 65% do not monitor performance indicators, only 3% have an accounting system that allows to record their operations and obtain financial information for decision-making.

In addition to the above, background studies show that many SMEs do not adopt marketing practices or use basic practices, without implementing long-term strategies and even fewer digital marketing strategies that allow them to achieve competitiveness and long-term permanence (Sorina-Diana et al., 2013; Bretcu, 2014; Gutiérrez & Nava, 2016). In Mexico, the few existing studies (Saavedra & Saavedra, 2014; Alcántara & Goytortúa, 2013; Peterson & Crittenden, 2020) account for the incipient application of marketing practices in companies in this sector. Thus, although they are aware of these practices, they face serious limitations on their implementation due to their low financial capacity, lack of specific knowledge on how to implement these practices and lack of trained staff. This situation would be detracting from its competitiveness and is a disadvantage in the face of a highly competitive internal and external environment; on the other hand, there are few studies on marketing practices in SMEs, which generate ignorance about the practices used by SMEs and their impact on improving the performance of SMEs. Previous studies have been based on business practices in general, without specifying appropriate practices for SMEs (Bocconcelli et al., 2018), hence the importance of conducting this research that aims to know the marketing practices used by SMEs in Mexico City, and check whether there is a link between these and internal competitiveness, as measured by the IDB's competitiveness map, considering the size and sector in which they operate. It is appropriate to note that this article corresponds to one third of a broader project called "Determining the Competitiveness of SMEs in the Federal District" which includes eight areas of enterprises, using IDB's competitiveness map (adapted by Saavedra, 2014b) as described in section 2.1.

This work is divided into three sections 1. Literature review, where marketing practices in SMEs are developed, competitiveness in SMEs and marketing practices and their relationship to competitiveness; 2. Methodology, this section describes the IDB's competitiveness map and the operationalization of the study variables; 3. The competitiveness of SMEs in Mexico City, which presents the state-of-the-art that includes preliminary findings and findings on marketing practices; finally, the last section is the conclusions.

1 Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, in the case of Mexico: Companies with up to 10 workers are classified as micro, with annual sales revenues of up to 4 million pesos. Small from 11 to 30 workers (trade sector) and from 11 to 50 workers (Industry and Services sector), with annual sales revenues from 4.01 to 100 million pesos. Medium from 51 to 250 workers (industry sector), from 51 to 100 workers (Services Sector), and from 31 to 100 workers (Trade sector), who report annual sales revenues of between 100.01 and 250 million pesos (Secretaría de Economía, 2009).

## 2. Review of the literature

### 2.1. *Marketing practices in SMEs*

Studies on marketing practices stand out the usefulness of these practices to achieve better results, the way they can be implemented as well as the most common practices used by SMEs. In this context, Sheetal et al. (2012) refer to marketing as a strategy based on 4Ps and is able to influence the performance of small businesses; however, new and emerging concepts such as: network marketing, innovative marketing, standardization vs. adaptation and grouping have been developed in the current market; as well as contingency factors that relate to business, management, product, market and customer issues. On the other hand, marketing through three dimensions (cultural, strategic and tactical) can be applied in the case of SMEs. Also, Sheetal et al. (2012) state that only effective marketing could help SMEs gain competitive advantage through superior performance by using competitive marketing strategies, marketing mixes and market intelligence processes, which can benefit small businesses greatly while recommending the creation of business networks. On the other hand, Cepeda et al. (2017) and Petkovska et al. (2018) point out that SMEs have the opportunity to introduce new and better products thanks to their flexibility to adapt to market conditions, as well as apply marketing solutions according to the opportunities found in the market.

Likewise, Mehran and Zeinab (2020), refer that conventional marketing is not enough when SMEs face a turbulent moment of high competition, hence it is necessary for them to adopt innovative marketing constantly looking for new opportunities in the market with new processes, services and products that manage to place the company in advantage of the company over its competitors.

However, an empirical study conducted by Sheetal et al. (2012) revealed that SMEs do not apply marketing strategies appropriately to their context and are weak in the differentiation strategy; however, they follow low-cost pricing strategies, so they should seek differentiation in product development, i.e. look for market areas with specialized products. Also, small manufacturers need to use different selective product positioning strategies for each product. On the other hand, they need to improve their distribution channels in order to reach more customers and more markets, as well as incorporate e-marketing technology which can help the small entrepreneur reach a large number of buyers (Sheetal et al. 2012). In addition, Saavedra and Saavedra (2014) in the state of Hidalgo in Mexico found that SMEs use basic marketing techniques such as pricing based on production costs; in terms of innovation less than a third of entrepreneurs innovate in their products, concluding that they have little opportunity to reach international markets, thus limiting their competitiveness.

For their part, Petkovska et al. (2018), in a sample of 32 SMEs in Macedonia found that about half conduct market research, the other half stated that they do not do so because of lack of financial resources, lack of sufficient knowledge and trained staff, which is consistent with Cohen's findings (2017) that account for the limited marketing knowledge shown by SME employees, where only a quarter conduct promotional activities, 16% use customer satisfaction surveys and only 12% conduct marketing activities.

In order to understand the marketing practices used by SMEs in Table 1, a review of the background studies is presented, showing the SMEs that have identified these practices and how they are implemented.

**Table 1. Marketing Practices in SMEs**

<b>Marketing Practices in SMEs</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Findings</b>
Market research	Zapata (2001), Rojas and Briceño (2006), Coy et al. (2007), Alcántara et al. (2013), Wai-Sum (2005), Domínguez et al. (2012), Saavedra and Saavedra (2014), Petkovska et al. (2018)	It is expensive to make and they basically use it to know the size of the market and increase its sales. Customer oriented. They use the observation method and informal interviews with secondary sources of information.
Production-oriented marketing	Rojas and Briceño (2006), Domínguez et al. (2012), Monferrer (2013)	Products manufacture at the lowest cost with acceptable quality. They now their production capacity.
Customer-oriented marketing	Pelham (1997); Lin (1998), García (1998), Zapata (2001) Schlesinger and Useche (2005), Coca (2006), Coy, Shipley et al. (2007), Piedrahita and Paz (2010), Curmei et al. (2011), Lekmat et al. (2018), Sánchez et al. (2019), Peterson and Crittenden (2020)	They know their target market, but they do not know their characteristics: age, consumption habits, etc. They seek customer satisfaction. Relationships that last over time must be established. They use market segmentation. They are looking value for the customer.
Product	Rojas and Briceño (2006), Coy et al. (2007), Wai-Sum (2005), Curmei et al. (2011)	Emphasis on quality and its characteristics. Innovation should be considered as strategic.
Price	Rojas and Briceño (2006), Alcántara et al. (2013), Wai-Sum (2005), Curmei et al. (2011), Saavedra and Saavedra (2014)	Use of the cost method plus a profit percentage. Six out of ten set their price based on cost. The innovation approach should be included.
Place (distribution)	Rojas and Briceño (2006), Alcántara et al. (2013), Wai-Sum (2005), Curmei et al. (2011)	It is directed to the consumer willing to join innovation according to changes in markets.
Promotion	Rojas and Briceño (2006), Alcántara et al. (2013), Curmei et al. (2011), Wai-Sum (2005)	SMEs do not do any promotion, only personal sales, however, they must innovate in this practice.
Consuming of competition	Huck and McEwen (1981), Coca (2006), Lekmat et al. (2018)	The importance of knowing competitors is recognized, but they do not apply it. Although recent research refers that more than 50% applies it.

Marketing Practices in SMEs	Authors	Findings
Market strategies (general)	García and Álvarez (1996), Luk (1996), Carson et al. (2004), Curmei et al. (2011), Saavedra and Saavedra (2014), Mone et al. (2013)	Direct personal selling predominates. They apply strategies that promote sales. Marketing techniques connect SMEs to the market. They follow a segmentation strategy. They seek to establish marketing networks.
After sales service	Warren and Hutchinson (2000) Wai-Sum (2005), Monferrer (2013)	SMEs rarely implement this technique. This service is coupled with the ease that customers must have to make claims, about the product or service.
Marketing Innovation	Verhees and Meulenber (2004), O'Dwyer et al. (2009), Curmei et al. (2011), Saavedra and Saavedra (2014), Lekmat et al. (2018), Petkovska et al. (2018), Sánchez et al. (2019), Mehran and Zeinab (2020)	Improves performance by promoting value creation. Only a third party makes innovation in the product, process or organization. They have the ability to successfully introduce new products.
Sales forecast	Wai-Sum (2005), Curmei et al. (2011), Saavedra and Saavedra (2014)	Only a quarter met their sales goal. The marketing function in SMEs ensures that it achieves its objectives.
Brand	Wai-Sum (2005), Moferrer (2013), Saavedra and Saavedra (2014)	Own brand development. Differentiation should be sought through the brand. Less than half of SMEs have a registered trademark.

Fuente: Elaboración propia con base en los autores citados.

Thus, based on the previous review, it is concluded that the marketing area in SMEs includes the following practices: market plan, business strategies, competitor knowledge, pricing, new products, marketing, customer service, sales force and distribution system.

## 1.2. Competitiveness in SMEs

Competitiveness in SMEs has been studied and conceptualized differently; thus, according to Saavedra (2014b, p. 20) "competitiveness of a company depends on productivity, profitability, competitive position, position in the domestic and external market, inter-enterprise relations, regional sector and infrastructure and macroeconomic environment". This concept is derived from ECLAC's systemic competitiveness model, which states that business competitiveness is generated by the articulation of areas found in four levels or strata that are presented separately for a better study and analysis; these are (Esser et al., 1996, Saavedra, 2014b): 1) Macro level: Includes the eco-



conomic environment consisting mainly on budget policies, monetary, fiscal, exchange rate, commercial, and competition; 2) Target level: sociocultural factors, which mainly include the scale of values of society, i.e. how it is organized and how it is able to find consensus through the use of strategies and policy; 3) Meso level: Identified as regional development, which is mainly determined by infrastructure and equipment policies, productive articulation (clustering), territorial articulation (between territories, communities and cities), logistical capital (multimodal transportation, telecommunications and technology), intellectual capital (innovation), imports and exports; and finally 4) Micro Level: Internal Company Factors, which can be measured with IDB Competitiveness MAP, as described in section 2.1.

If competitiveness of SMEs were measured only by productivity, it would show the great disadvantage compared to large enterprises, because according to Dini and Stumpo (2018) micro-sized enterprises in Mexico reach only 8% of productivity, small companies reach 24% of productivity and medium companies reach 48% of productivity (with reference to large enterprises 100%). The lag is even larger when compared to European countries where the productivity gap of small businesses with the large enterprise is much smaller, as in Italy where micro-sized enterprises reach only 25% of productivity, small companies reach 62% of productivity and medium reach 84% of productivity.

Business competitiveness scholars have proposed models and indicators to determine the competitiveness of SMEs, so the OECD (1992) notes that the elements driving competitiveness are (a) the efficient management of production and inventories, b) the integration of the marketing plan, R+D, design, engineering and production, c) the combination of R+D and the one generated in higher education institutions and research centers, (d) adaptation to changes in demand and market developments, and (e) the ability to integrate into the value chain. For its part, the Economic Commission for Latin America, Cepal (1999) proposed to analyze business competitiveness with a single indicator which is export capacity, which makes it possible to know the countries that compete in industries, as well as to analyze competitiveness considering nine factors: internationalization, government and institutions, finance, infrastructure, business management, science and technology, human resources and the environment.

Likewise, Gómez (2002) suggests that there are endogenous (technology, human resources, management and marketing) and exogenous factors (economic context and market formation), which influence the competitiveness of SMEs. Others such as Quiroga (2003), Solleiro and Castañón (2005), Rubio and Aragón (2006), De la Cruz et al. (2006), Martínez et al. (2009), Rohvein et al. (2012), Barrios et al. (2019) have proposed models ranging from mathematicians, even the ones that consider the resources and capacities of companies, as well as those focused on value chain and process management, varying in the number and conceptualization of variables used. Later studies, such as those of Rodríguez and Fernández (2006), Morales and Castellanos (2007), Montoya et al. (2010), Cano et al. (2013), Narváez et al. (2013) and Ibarra et al. (2017), have applied both systemic and internal models to determine the competitiveness of SMEs.

### ***1.3. Marketing practices and their relationship to competitiveness***

The importance of studying marketing practices is that only effective marketing could help SMEs gain competitive advantage through superior performance that is achieved through competitive marketing strategies (Yan & Chew, 2011). Thus, several authors have analyzed the ability of marketing in boosting competitiveness in small businesses, some of these authors are: Huck and McEwen (1991), García and Álvarez (1996), Luk (1996), Pelham (1997), Lin (1998), Warren and Hutchinson (2000) Pelham

(2000), Rubio and Aragón (2002), Verhees y Meulenbergh (2004), Siu et al. (2004), Aragón and Rubio (2005), Piedrahita and Paz (2010), Franco et al. (2014), Lekmat et al. (2018) and Joensuu-Salo et al. (2018), who have found a significant relationship between marketing practices and the performance of SMEs. For their part, Pil and Holwelg (2003), refer that SMEs have advantages such as: proximity to their customers and networking, being able to gain a competitive advantage by serving their market in a better way.

Also, Sánchez et al. (2019), in a sample of 400 SMEs corresponding to the furniture industry in Jalisco found that innovative marketing creates value for the customer, and at the same time it also increases the competitiveness of the company, since it leads to cost optimization and a better use of technological capabilities. However, Mone et al. (2013) realizes that there are few SMEs that establish a measurement of the performance of the marketing area, although they consider it important.

In the same regard, Gamal et al. (2020) analyzed market orientation (including customer orientation, competition orientation and interfunctional coordination) in 393 SMEs in Saudi Arabia, finding a significant positive relationship between it and its performance, which is because market-oriented SMEs can better meet customer needs and expectations through the creation of innovative products and services, using its capabilities to take advantage of current opportunities, facing its competitors and thus creating a sustainable competitive advantage, as verified by García et al. (2014).

For their part, Cuevas et al. (2020) studied 341 SME companies in the state of Guanajuato, Mexico, and established the existence of a significant positive relationship between marketing innovation and the performance of companies, considering aspects such as: marketing methods, product design, packaging modifications, significant product changes to enter new segments, new distribution systems, new concepts and means of promotion, launch of products or services in new segments, new strategies to incentivize sales and new pricing methods.

Curmei et al. (2011) refer that among the factors that influence the competitiveness of SMEs can be included the high-impact innovation that must be considered from strategic marketing planning as a central element in the segmentation, positioning and sizing of the marketing mix, seeking to obtain competitive advantages.

Studies have proven the relationship between marketing practices and the competitiveness of SMEs (whether conceptualized as performance, productivity, competitive advantage), making it possible to formulate the following hypothesis:

**Hi<sub>1</sub>:** There is a relationship between marketing practices and the competitiveness of SMEs in Mexico City.

From which the following null hypothesis is created:

**Ho<sub>1</sub>:** There is no relationship between marketing practices and the competitiveness of SMEs in Mexico City.

Specific assumptions were also formulated in order to determine this relationship according to the size and sector of SMEs.

**Hi<sub>2</sub>:** There is a relationship between the competitiveness of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and marketing practices

**Ho<sub>2</sub>:** There is no relationship between the competitiveness of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and marketing practices

**Hi<sub>3</sub>:** There is no relationship between the competitiveness of industrial, commercial and service enterprises and marketing practices

**Ho<sub>3</sub>:** There is no relationship between the competitiveness of the industrial, commercial and service company and commercialization practices.

## 2. Method

A descriptive study with a correlational perspective was carried out by identifying the marketing practices used by SMEs and establishing the relationship between internal competitiveness and the practices. Data collection was carried out using a structured direct questionnaire called IDB Competitiveness Map, which is described in paragraph 2.1. A sample of 400 companies corresponding to Mexico City's 16 mayoralties was determined on a population of 382,056 economic units (INEGI, 2010), with a confidence level of 95% and a maximum error of 5%. The questionnaire was applied in a personalized way to entrepreneurs who voluntarily agreed to participate in this study.

Statistical testing of hypotheses was performed using chi squared method, with a confidence level of 95% and an error of 5%. Therefore, the hypothesis cannot be rejected when  $p > 0.05$ . Spearman's correlation test was also applied.

### 2.1. IDB Competitiveness Map

Competitiveness map<sup>2</sup> was developed by Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo (BID) and adapted by the Chamber of Commerce of Medellín and Antioquía to carry out a business diagnosis that would allow to know the strengths and weaknesses of SMEs (Martínez & Álvarez, 2006), and the instrument adapted by Saavedra is used (2014b). This instrument consists of a questionnaire containing 145 questions that are grouped into eight areas, the answers of which are on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, where 1 corresponds to does not comply and 5 fully complies. The eight areas on the map are: Strategic Planning, Production and Operations, Quality Assurance, Marketing, Accounting and Finance, Human Capital, Environmental Management and Information Systems.

On the other hand, Saavedra (2014b) established the assessment of global and area competitiveness according to compliance that mark the responses collected by the entrepreneurs, in the following ranges:

0-20%: Very low competitiveness

21%-40%: Low competitiveness

41%-60%: Medium competitiveness

61% to 80%: High competitiveness

81% to 100%: Very high competitiveness

The reliability of the questionnaire measured with Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was 91%, which means high reliability. This research used only the competitiveness data of the marketing area, given the importance of its study. Subsequently, the prac-

2 It is known as a map since the result is presented in a spider-like scheme by obtaining an assessment of each area of the company



tices that make it up are defined according to the structure of the IDB Competitiveness Map questionnaire (Saavedra, 2014b and Saavedra & Milla, 2017):

**Market plan.** Annual and written market plan, where the market strategies based on the structure of the market and the identification of opportunities are developed, allows to direct and coordinate the marketing effort that is necessary for the achievement of sales objectives and profits of the company (Kotler, 2001). Very few SMEs carry out a market plan which limits the implementation of business strategies (Wai-Sum, 2005; Saavedra & Saavedra, 2014).

**Trading strategies.** Definition of the target market, introduction strategies, positioning and marketing, as well as to know the market segments to develop trading strategies according to the objectives that want to be achieved. These are established based on the sales forecast, estimating the number of products or services to be placed in a given place and time (Longenecker et al., 2012). SMEs carry out business strategies considering that they serve the final consumer (García & Álvarez, 1996; Luk, 1996; Saavedra & Saavedra, 2014).

**Knowledge of competitors.** To have information from competitors as an essential element to carry out effective planning of market strategies; the company must constantly benchmark the marketing with its competitors in order to identify competitive advantages or disadvantages (Kotler, 2001). SMEs understand the importance of meeting competitors, but few perform this role (Huck & McEwen, 1991).

**Pricing.** Pricing based on total costs. Price is part of the value that consumers perceive, so a good definition and price strategy lead to success (Peñalosa et al. 2017). Price is the most effective component of marketing strategies because it is directly related to the profits, survival and growth of the company since it drives sales (Sheetal et al., 2012; Schnarch, 2013). SMEs mainly determine prices based on costs and a percentage of profits (Rojas & Briceño, 2006; Alcántara et al., 2013; Wai-Sum, 2005; Saavedra & Saavedra, 2014).

**New products.** It must be determined whether new products have generated significant sales and profits in the company. The key of success for SMEs is innovation through the continuous development of knowledge to achieve its positioning in a dynamic environment (O'Dwyer et al., 2009). This is how innovation becomes a fundamental aspect of the marketing process; it is important to innovate in technological advances and customer tastes and preferences. SMEs should emphasize the quality and characteristics of products that stand out (Rojas & Briceño, 2006; Coy et al., 2007; Wai-Sum, 2005); however, very few innovate (Verhees & Meulenbergh, 2004; O'Dwyer et al., 2009; Saavedra & Saavedra, 2014).

**Marketing.** These correspond to all the activities carried out to facilitate and stimulate exchanges between different organizations, among which are planning, setting the price, promoting and distributing the products or providing the services, in order to know the needs of consumers and the evaluation of promotional activities to promote sales and achieve the objectives of the company (Peñalosa et al., 2017). SMEs can design production-oriented marketing strategies (Rojas & Briceño, 2006; Domínguez et al., 2012); or customer-oriented strategies (Pelham, 1997; Lin, 1998; García, 1998; Zapata, 2001; Schlesinger & Useche, 2005; Coy et al., 2007; Peterson & Crittenden, 2020; Piedrahita & Paz, 2010); however, very few use promotion strategies (Rojas & Briceño, 2006; Alcántara et al., 2013; Wai-Sum, 2005).

**Customer service.** It refers to the knowledge and satisfaction of the customer's needs, as well as having catalogs of technical specifications of the products. Franco et al. (2014) suggest that poor service of SMEs may lead to dissatisfaction of their custom-

ers and affect their image and competitiveness, thus, hindering customer loyalty. On the other hand, very few companies in the SME sector implement after-sales services (Warren & Hutchinson, 2000; Wai-Sum, 2005).

**Sales force.** Setting sales targets for sellers should be sought to have a trained, motivated and competent sales force to create an employment tie in the company. The sales force functions as a bridge between the company and customers, and for an efficient management it must be taken into account: sales objectives, strategy, organization, volume, promotions to sellers (Kotler, 2001). SMEs barely meet their sales targets (Wai-Sum, 2005, Saavedra & Saavedra, 2014), due to both internal and external factors that affect their performance.

**Distribution system.** Distribution is the process carried out to ensure that the products/services are delivered in the right time and place for the final consumer, i.e. an effective distribution. To carry out the distribution process, the type of distribution must be planned: mass, exclusive or selective and the distribution channel: direct or through channels including wholesalers, retailers and commercial agents (Sheetal et al., 2012; Peñalosa et al., 2017). SMEs generally use direct distribution to the final consumer (Rojas & Briceño, 2006; Alcántara et al., 2013, Wai-Sum, 2005).

## 2.2. Operationalization of variables

Table 2 shows how variables were operationalized according to the hypotheses of this research.

**Table 2. Operationalization of variables**

Hypotheses	Variable 1	Variable 2	Indicators Variable 2
<b>Hi<sub>1</sub>:</b> There is a relationship between marketing practices and competitiveness of SMEs in Mexico City.	<b>Competitiveness</b>  It is measured as the simple average of global competitiveness, applying the IDB's competitiveness map of companies that make up the sample.	Marketing Practices	Market Plan Commercial Strategies Knowledge of Competitors Pricing New Products Marketing Customer service Sales force Distribution System
<b>Hi<sub>2</sub>:</b> There is a relationship between the competitiveness of micro, small and medium-sized.	<b>Competitiveness by size</b>  It is measured separately as the simple average of the global competitiveness of companies according to their size:  Micro Small Medium	Marketing Practices	Market Plan Commercial Strategies Knowledge of Competitors Pricing New Products Marketing Customer service Sales force Distribution System

Hypotheses	Variable 1	Variable 2	Indicators Variable 2
<b>H<sub>3</sub>:</b> There is no relationship between competitiveness of the industrial, commercial and service enterprise and marketing	<b>Sector competitiveness</b> It is measured separately as the simple average of the global competitiveness of companies according to the sector: Industry Commerce Service	Marketing Practices	Market Plan Commercial Strategies Knowledge of Competitors Pricing New Products Marketing Customer service Sales force Distribution System

Source: Own elaboration.

### 3. La competitividad de las PYME en la Ciudad de México

This study presents a third of the research project titled “Determining the Competitiveness of SMEs in the Federal District”<sup>3</sup> which identified the internal competitiveness of SMEs by considering eight areas, so that first (paragraph 3.1), a summary of Saavedra’s preliminary findings (2014b) is presented in order to contextualize this research, secondly, the interpretation of the findings of this research is presented (3.2).

#### 3.1. Preliminary findings

These findings correspond to the first part of the research in which the competitiveness of SMEs was analyzed as a whole without separating by areas, as stated by Saavedra (2014b).

The sample consists of 41 (10.3%) companies in the industry sector, 192 trade companies (48.0%) and 167 service companies (41.8%), a similar proportion of the national sectoral classifications according to INEGI (2020). In relation to the size, it consisted on: 364 (91.0%) micro-enterprises, 29 (7.3%) small enterprises and only 7 (1.8%) medium-sized enterprises, as can be seen, there are more micro-sized enterprises (1-10 workers) in the trade and services sectors, information that agrees with the national stratification presented by INEGI (2020). Average global competitiveness was only 41.85%,<sup>4</sup> where 73.3% of companies present very low or low competitiveness and only 17% present high or very high competitiveness (Saavedra, 2014b). This difference in the level of competitiveness is because there are companies in this city with very modern production processes that use high technology and qualified labor capable of exporting their products, and also informal companies with artisan production processes and precarious working conditions, especially those found in the rural sector (Gaceta Oficial del Distrito Federal, 2013). Despite the importance of SMEs, in Mexico only 4.3% of GDP is used for financing, which shows lag when compared to some emerging and industrialized countries that Mexico competes with or is a partner,

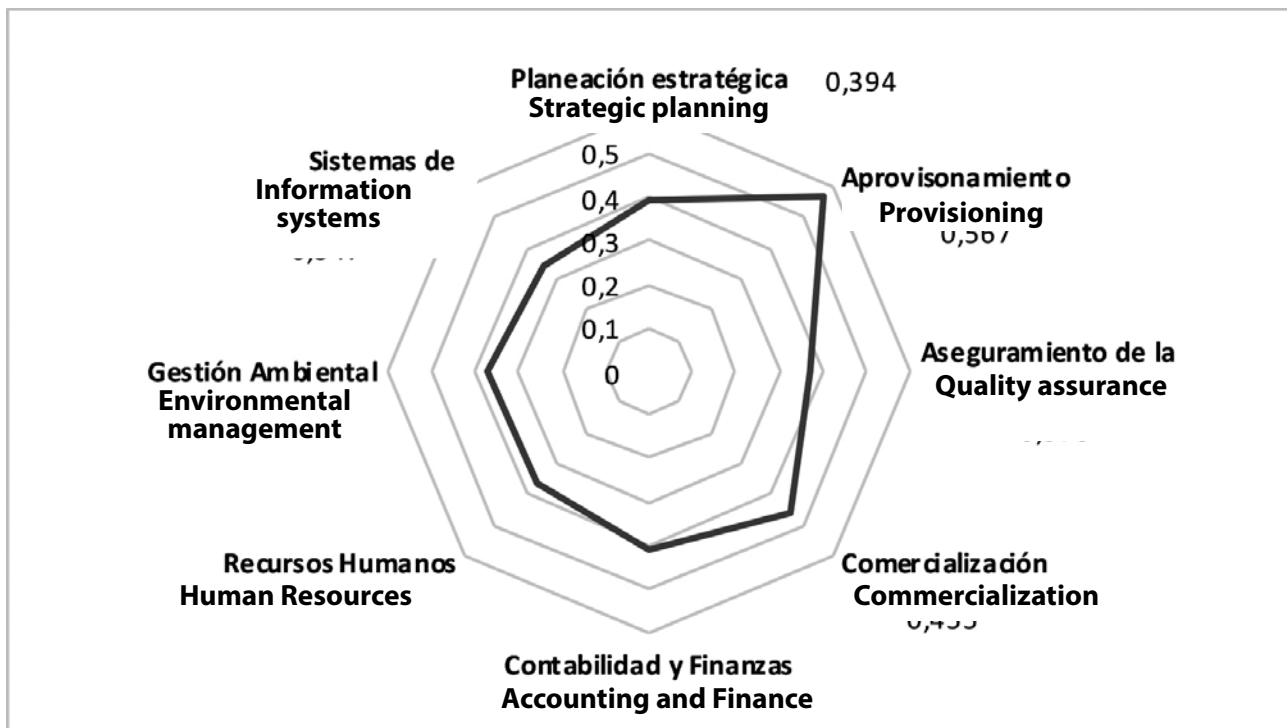
3 On February 5, 2016, the General Agreement of the Plenary of the Federal Judiciary is published in the Official Journal, changing the name of the Federal District to Mexico City throughout its normative body. For this reason, this work refers to Mexico City.

4 It was calculated as average for all sampled enterprises

such as Brazil where this amount is 9.6%, Spain with 19.6% and the United States with 29.4% of GDP (Gaceta Oficial del Distrito Federal, 2013).

The results of global competitiveness by area show that the only area that manages to go above 50% of competitiveness is that of supply, leaving all the other laggards; and as can be observed marketing reaches only 45.5% of competitiveness, which is worrying since an important part corresponds to service and trade companies that serve mainly the final consumer, showing the weakness in the performance of their internal processes which depend directly on their own resources (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Competitiveness Map of SMEs in Mexico City**



Source: Saavedra, 2014b

Findings of competitiveness by sector account that only 36.6% show high competitiveness and about 60% low competitiveness. In terms of trade sectors, such as services, three-quarters of businesses have low and very low competitiveness. This situation is not beneficial, since SMEs in this city are in a risk, as these contribute to 17.5% of Gross Domestic Product, with an average growth rate higher than the national one, which shows a high economic dynamism with an economy focused on trade and services (Secretaría de Desarrollo Económico, 2019). In this city, tourism has caused the development of lodging, food and beverage companies, and investment opportunities have driven the development of industries that need to achieve high levels of competitiveness that allow them to remain in the long term and continue to generate the jobs required (Gaceta Oficial del Distrito Federal, 2013). However, this finding makes it possible to know that the industry sector has higher levels of competitiveness than the trade and services sectors, which predominate in this city.

In terms of competitiveness by company size, the results demonstrate that 80.2% of micro-enterprises show low competitiveness, while 75.9% of small business are highly competitive, and 100% of medium-sized enterprises are very competitive; this implies that competitiveness is related to the size of the company, which is reasonable

because a larger company has more resources, technology, human staff, etc., that boost their competitiveness. These findings imply that the sixth part of the national tourist GDP in Mexico City and a high proportion of hotels and restaurants are produced by micro and small businesses (Gaceta Oficial del Distrito Federal, 2013), and it is a pending challenge to increase the competitiveness of companies in this sector, because of the importance that it represents for both the economy of Mexico City and Mexico.

### ***3.2. Marketing practices and competitiveness of SMEs in Mexico City***

This section presents the findings of competitiveness of the marketing area, and their relationship to global competitiveness by size and sector, which correspond to one third of the research where marketing practices are analyzed as well as their relationship to competitiveness, considering the size and sector.

#### *3.2.1. Findings and discussion of the competitiveness level of the marketing area*

The competitiveness level achieved by each of the marketing practices analyzed is presented in Table 3, i.e. the competitiveness measured according to the use of practices in these companies. As can be seen in Table 3, there are four practices in which predominate high and very high competitiveness: pricing (69.5%), customer service (57.75%), sales force (54%) and distribution system (70.75%, which could be considered as basic practices that SMEs should perform. These findings are in agreement with those by presented by Wai-Sum (2005), Saavedra and Saavedra (2014), Cohen (2017), Petkovska et al. (2018), which state that SMEs only carry out marketing activities based on sales, because they usually serve the final consumer. Thus, in the results shown in Table 3 stand out the practices of the marketing area in which predominate low and very low competitiveness, these are: Market plan (62.5%), trading strategies (52.75%), knowledge of competitors (64.75%), new products (55.75%) marketing (51.55%), which are considered to be advanced practices that have a direct relationship to the long-term vision of SMEs (Sheetal et al., 2012). This finding is similar to the one mentioned by Huck and McEwen (1991), García and Álvarez (1996), Luk (1996), Wai-Sum (2005), Rojas and Briceño (2006), Sheetal et al. (2012), Alcántara et al. (2013), Saavedra and Saavedra (2014), which account for the little or no use of these advanced practices in SMEs, implying the predominance of short-term vision in SMEs studied in this research. Therefore, it is necessary for these companies to implement advanced marketing practices, as Mehran and Zeinab (2020) point out, since traditional practices are insufficient in a highly competitive environment.



**Table 3. Competitiveness of marketing practices (Percentage)**

Competitiveness range	Marketing plan	Estrategias Comerciales	Conocimiento de competidores	Determinación de precios	Productos nuevos	Marketing	Servicio al cliente	Fuerza de ventas	Sistema de Distribución
Very high 81 – 100%	18.75	12.75	8.25	56.75	7.25	12.75	22.50	25.00	57.75
High 61-80%	7.00	10.50	11.00	12.75	15.00	16.50	35.25	29.00	13.00
Medium 41-60%	11.75	20.00	16.00	14.00	22.00	19.25	23.50	21.00	10.25
Low 21-40%	9.75	34.25	33.25	4.75	38.00	27.50	15.50	11.25	4.50
Very low 0-20%	52.75	22.50	31.50	11.75	17.75	24.00	3.25	13.75	14.50
<b>Total</b>	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: own elaboration

### 3.2.2. Findings and discussion of the relationship between marketing practices and the competitiveness of SMEs

The results presented in Table 4 show that all marketing practices are significantly related to the competitiveness of SMEs, implying the importance of marketing practices in boosting the competitiveness of SMEs. Also, Spearman's correlation test allowed to determine the strength of this correlation, showing that all correlations are positive, and that there is a high correlation of this area with global competitiveness (68.2%). When conducting the individual analysis, the results of each of the practices show that the highest correlations were observed in sales force (64.7%), marketing (61.3%), customer service (53.6%) market plan (5.16%), which implies the importance of implementing the use of these practices to boost the competitiveness of SMEs. These findings are consistent with the studies conducted by Huck and McEwen (1991), Luk (1996), Pelham (1997), Lin (1998), Warren and Hutchinson (2000), Pelham (2000), Rubio and Aragón (2002), Verhees and Meulenberg (2004), Siu et al. (2004), Aragón and Rubio (2005), Piedrahita and Paz (2010), Franco et al. (2014), Lekmat et al. (2018), and Joensuu-Salo et al. (2018), who have found that there is a relationship between marketing practices and the competitiveness of SMEs. According to the above results, the null hypothesis (Ho1) is rejected and it is concluded that there is a relationship between competitiveness and all marketing practices.

**Table 4. Relationship between global competitiveness and practices from the marketing area**

Factor	P Value	Correlación de Spearman
Market Plan	.000	0.516
Commercial Strategies	.000	0.441
Knowledge of Competitors	.000	0.473
Pricing	.000	0.426
New Products	.000	0.409
Marketing	.000	0.613
Customer Service	.000	0.536
Productivity	.000	0.647
Distribution System	.000	0.411
Global productivity and competitiveness of the marketing area	.000	0.682

Source: Own elaboration.

Note:  $H_0$  is rejected if  $p \geq 0.05$

### 3.2.3. Findings and discussion of the relationship between competitiveness by the size of the company and marketing practices

A summary of the result of the chi square test ( $p$ = statistical significance) and Spearman's correlation test, marketing practices and global competitiveness is presented in Table 5 based on the size of the companies. As mentioned, micro and small companies are important in market plan practices (with a correlation of 41% and 49%, respectively), new products (61% and 67% correlation), marketing (with 33% and 41% correlation), customer service (with 54% and 57% correlation) and sales force (42% and 48% correlation), in the competitiveness of these companies, this is because marketing practices allow the entrepreneur to have a long-term vision, innovate constantly, generate marketing strategies to stay in the market and improve customer service with a trained sales force, thus generating competitive advantages. This is similar to what was mentioned by Yan and Chew (2011) and Sheetal et al. (2012) in the sense that only competitive marketing strategies can help SMEs gain competitive advantage and therefore higher performance; this is considered necessary to increase the productivity of micro and small businesses since the gap with respect to the large enterprise is very significant (Dini & Stumpo, 2018). With regard to medium-sized enterprises, the results showed no competitiveness relationship with marketing practices, because, as these enterprises are larger they are more structured and have other factors that affect their competitiveness. The above results partially reject  $H_{02}$  and conclude that there is a relationship between the competitiveness of micro and small companies and marketing practices, involving a long-term vision by entrepreneurs and that could guarantee the permanence of SMEs.

**Table 5. Relationship between competitiveness by size and marketing practices**

Global Competitiveness and Marketing Practices/ Size	Micro <i>p</i>	Spearman's correlation	Small <i>p</i>	Spearman's correlation	Medium <i>p</i>	Spearman's correlation
Market Plan	.000	0.412	.000	0.492	.214	0.076
Commercial Strategies	.000	0.492	.214	0.076	.569	0.070
Knowledge of Competitors	.456	0.040	.559	0.018	.732	0.057
Pricing	.837	0.000	.849	0.018	.166	0.043
New products	.034	0.512	.009	0.673	.650	0.066
Marketing	.001	0.334	.001	0.415	.300	0.010
Customer service	.000	0.547	.002	0.571	.531	0.075
Sales power	.000	0.422	.001	0.480	.348	0.086
Distribution system	.730	0.021	.476	0.039	.672	0.041

Source: Own elaboration.

Note:  $H_0$  is rejected if  $p \geq 0.05$ 

#### 3.2.4. Findings and discussion of the relationship between competitiveness by sector and the marketing practices

The results in Table 6 summarize the result of the chi squared test ( $p$ = statistical significance) and Spearman's correlation test, marketing practices and global competitiveness according to the sector the companies belong to. As can be seen, there is a relationship of only four practices in the marketing area (knowledge of competitors, 36% correlation; pricing, 44% correlation; marketing, 37% correlation and customer service, 39% correlation and competitiveness of industrial SMEs). This result is, on the one hand, because the industrial area does not serve the final consumer directly, and on the other hand, because there are other factors in the industrial sector that drive its competitiveness such as quality systems, qualified labor and technology and marketing practices in a reduced way. Additionally, it is observed that in the trade and service sectors, seven marketing practices are important for boosting competitiveness: market plan, business strategies, knowledge of competitors, new products, customer service, sales force and distribution systems, as a result of having a long-term vision, generating strategies that drive competitive advantage, paying attention to competitors' strategies, innovating, and putting the customers first, knowing their needs and delivering the products/services in a timely manner and with the agreed specifications, and providing advice at all times, because SMEs in these sectors serve mainly the final consumer. Since it was not possible to establish a significant relationship of all the practices used by sectors with global competitiveness,  $H_{03}$  is partially rejected.

**Table 6. Relationship between competitiveness by sector and marketing practices in the area**

Global competitiveness and marketing practices	Industry $p$	Spearman's correlation	Commerce $p$	Spearman's correlation	Services $p$	Spearman's correlation
Market Plan	.357	0.088	.002	0.491	.016	0.400
Commercial Strategies	.647	0.028	.016	0.366	.016	0.345
Knowledge of Competitors	.032	0.360	.032	0.450	.011	0.511
Pricing	.033	0.440	.112	0.081	.516	0.078
New products	.783	0.023	.002	0.328	.009	0.459
Marketing	.041	0.371	.920	0.019	.113	0.089
Customer service	.022	0.391	.005	0.597	.018	0.613
Sales power	.378	0.066	.006	0.356	.008	0.417
Distribution system	.226	0.011	.001	0.317	.000	0.305

Nota: Se rechaza  $H_0$  si  $p \geq 0.05$

The results of this study make it possible to know that SMEs only use basic marketing practices that relate to cost-based pricing, customer service, sales force and distribution system, which shows the entrepreneur's short-term vision, thus it is corroborated that he/she does not conduct market plans, does not design business strategies, does not know the competitors, does not innovate constantly, does not include promotions to boost sales, maintain and expand the market, hence resulting in a low competitiveness shown in the indicator of global competitiveness of this factor that only reaches 45.5%, and in a low competitiveness level of these advanced practices by not using SMEs. This is worrying since all marketing practices are related to the global competitiveness of companies, so it is necessary to encourage the use of advanced marketing practices, for which it is necessary the entrepreneur's vision towards the long term, which allows him/her to survive and be in the market. Micro and small enterprises depend most on marketing practices to boost their competitiveness, as their implementation can help them achieve competitive advantages. Trade and services sectors depend most on marketing practices to boost their competitiveness, because there is great competition in these sectors due to their predominance in Mexico City, and also since they serve the final consumer. Thus, these findings indicate that entrepreneurs must understand the importance of using their resources and capacities in the implementation of marketing practices, given the important relationship with competitiveness that generates profitability in the long term and permanence in the market.

The main contribution of this research is to know the marketing practices used by SMEs and the establishment of a significant relationship between SMEs and competitiveness. The main limitation is the use of a sample of voluntary subjects, which does not allow the generalization of the findings to the entire population.

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